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Similar archetypes and different narratives: a comparative study of Chinese "Yeh Hsien" and European Cinderella stories

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Abstract
The story of Cinderella is probably one of the most widely told fairy tales in the world. The Chinese tales "Yeh Hsien" (葉限) recorded in *Youyang Zazu* (酉陽雜俎, *The Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*), dating back to ninth-century China, is one of the oldest Cinderella tales. Based on a comparative reading of the stories of Chinese "Yeh Hsien," Charles Perrault's "Cendrillon ou la petite pantouffle de verre" in his *Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (1697), and the German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Aschenputtel" in their *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (1812), this paper seeks to highlight both common patterns and intrinsic differences between these stories, and to cast some light on what lies behind these similarities and differences.

Keywords Cinderella · Architype · Beauty · Happily-ever-after

Introduction

The story of Cinderella is probably one of the most widely told fairy tales in the world. According to varying estimations, there could be hundreds or even thousands of different versions of Cinderella across cultures (Zipes 2016, p. 358). One of the oldest Cinderella tales[1] was recorded as "Yeh Hsien" (《葉限》) in *Youyang Zazu* (《酉陽雜俎》, *The Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*), dating back

[1] In making a comparative analysis between "Yeh Hsien" and European Cinderella stories, this paper seeks to avoid the Eurocentric views of what constituted a Cinderella tale. In recent anthropology and folklore studies, the term "Cinderella" has already become markedly multicultural. As Thompson notes, "Cinderella is actually an all-encompassing name that represents the body of Cinderella variants across cultures" (2013, p. 74).

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to ninth-century China. Two most prominent European versions of the story are Charles Perrault's "Cendrillon ou la petite pantouffle de verre" in his *Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (1697), and the Brothers Grimm's "Aschenputtel" in his *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (1812).

Like many other fairy tales and folktales, the story of Cinderella is highly archetypal. Similar character types and plot patterns can be seen among its variants around the world. These elements constitute the skeleton of a story, which not only makes its different versions easily recognizable, but also offers a sense of familiarity to the reader. While it is important to recognize the common archetypes in the analysis of folktales, it is equally important to keep in mind that folklore as a specific discourse genre can be mapped onto everyday practice and social world inhabited by its audience. In other words, "folklore as a mirror of culture frequently reveals the areas of special concern" (Dundes 1969, p. 471). Based on a comparative reading of the stories of Chinese "Yeh Hsien," Perrault's "Cendrillon" and Grimms' "Aschenputtel," this paper seeks to highlight both common patterns and intrinsic differences between these stories, and to cast some light on what lies behind these similarities and differences.

The archetypal characters in the Cinderella stories

The Chinese story "Yeh Hsien" is about Yeh Hsien, the daughter of a tribal leader, being bullied by her stepmother after the death of her father. After the stepmother steals her "pet fish" and eats it, Yeh Hsien becomes extremely upset. Under the guidance of a divine being, Yeh Hsien discovers the fish bones, which have magical wish-granting powers. She prays to the fish-bones and they grant all her wishes. In a subsequent local festival, Yeh Hsien puts on fine clothes and attends the event in secret. Being worried that her stepmother and stepsister may recognize her, she flees back home, losing one shoe on the way. A local cave-dwelling tribesman finds the shoe and presents it to the king of a neighboring country, who then hunts for the owner of the shoe. After a long search, Yeh Hsien is found. The King brings her home and marries her.

There are apparent reoccurring structures and characters in "Yeh Hsien" and many other versions of Cinderella stories. One way of explaining these commonalities is by what C. G. Jung's concept of "collective unconscious," which is made up of "primordial types," or "universal images that have existed since the remotest times" (1981, p. 5). According to Jung, there is a series of collective behavioral patterns, or archetypes, deep within every human mind that gives shape to our understanding and engagement of life in the world. In fairy tales and folklore, archetypes are often concretized through figures such as the hero, the child, the old man, the witch, the trickster, and others. Closely related but different from Jung's psychological perspective, the Russian scholar Vladimir Propp took a structuralist approach and understood archetypal characters to be "functions" in various spheres of action. In his seminal work *The Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp (1968, pp. 79–80) worked out a classification scheme of 31 "functions" or "actions," which can be grouped into seven spheres of action, or types or characters. Not all the functions or

Table 1 The types of characters in three Cinderella stories

Types or characters	"Yeh Hsien"	"Cendrillon"	"Aschenputtel"
The villain	Stepmother	Stepmother	Stepmother
The donor	A man descended from the sky	Fairy Godmother	Fairy Godmother
The helper/s	A fish	Mice, a rat, and lizards etc.	The magical tree, white doves
The Princess (or sought-after person)	King of Tuohan	Prince	Prince
The dispatcher	Absent	Fairy Godmother	Fairy Godmother
The hero	Yeh Hsien	Cendrillon	Aschenputtel
The false Hero	Absent (a stepsister)	Stepsisters	Stepsisters

all character types need to be present in every story. Applying the Proppian model to the Cinderella stories, we can identify common types of characters in Chinese and European versions of these tales (Table 1).

The similarities of archetypal characters in Chinese and other versions of Cinderella stories have been noticed by Lin Yutang (林語堂), one of the earlier translators of "Yeh Hsien" into English. He observes that "the striking thing about this Chinese version is that it contains the elements of both the Slavonic tradition, where an animal friend is an important feature, and the Germanic tradition, where the loss of the slipper at a ball is the important feature. The cruel stepmother and stepsisters are common to both" (Lin 1942, p. 941). A closer look at the plot lines also reveals more matching elements between "Yeh Hsien" and the European versions of Cinderella. One of the enduring elements comes from the politics of a blended family. In Perrault's "Cendrillon" and Grimms' "Aschenputtel," there is an "initial situation" which explains the makeup of Cinderella's family, including her dead mother, ineffectual father, evil stepmother and stepsisters. Similarly, the Chinese story of "Yeh Hsien" is about an orphaned daughter mistreated by her stepmother. Other common elements in these Cinderella tales includes a supernatural helper, animals that have certain types of magic power, a special event like a festival or a ball, a lost shoe, a shoe test, and the heroine getting married after fitting into the shoe.

While similar archetypal characters and plot lines are found in various Cinderella stories, the same "story" gives rise to different narratives. The western narrative of Cinderella has a rich and continuous tradition. Throughout centuries, the story has been told, written, translated, and produced over and over again to become a narrative underpinning some basic strands of western popular culture. The images of Cinderella have been magnified into a cultural mainstay. The Chinese "Yeh Hsien," however, has been circulated to this day mainly as a historical and academic document among sinologists and folklorists. The name of "Yeh Hsien" is probably still unfamiliar to most native Chinese readers today. The reasons behind the different trajectories of Chinese and European Cinderella stories are complex. Scholars have tried to offer explanations from the multitude of historical, cultural

and anthropological perspectives (Waley 1947; Liu 1995; Beauchamp 2010; Zhang 2018). This paper intends to take a more eclectic and literary approach to explain the substantial differences between Chinese and European Cinderella narratives. Based on a close reading of the original "Yeh Hsien" story, the following discussion illustrates how some of the most important motifs are treated differently in Chinese and European Cinderella stories, and how these differences may in turn account for different degrees of liveliness and popularity of these narratives in a modern context.

The ashes and the dung

As the title of both Perrault's "Cendrillon" and Grimms' "Aschenputtel" suggests, the name of the protagonist is connected in some way with the ashes, and the story rely heavily on the symbolic significance of ashes. On the surface "to dwell among the ashes" indicates Cinderella's lowly status in the household, expressing a sense of humility, or, rather, humiliation. Paradoxically, it may also suggest a desirable position, since "in ancient times, to be the guardian of the hearth—the duty of the Vestal Virgins—was one of the most prestigious ranks, if not the most exalted, available to a female" (Bettelheim 2010, p. 254). Additionally, ashes also symbolize grief and mourning, in this case Cinderella's for her mother. Therefore, the symbol of "ashes" is a detail of great complexity in European tales of Cinderella.

In contrast, the protagonist's name in the Chinese tale carries no such implication. "Yeh Hsien" is in fact such an odd name in Chinese that scholars would believe that "the name of the protagonist is but a phonetic transcription of a foreign term" (Moioli 2018, p. 234). Taking into consideration the intent of *zhiguai* (志怪) as a literary genre to record exotic occurrences of the empire's periphery, it is not entirely impossible that this name may have a foreign origin. Although the ashes are completely absent in "Yeh Hsien," there is another symbol of a parallel or equivalent significance: the dung.

This symbol of the dung occurs twice in the story. The first occurrence is after the stepmother kills and eats Yeh Hsien's enormous "pet fish," she buries its bones in a dunghill ("藏其骨于鬱棲之下"). The original Chinese here is *Yu Qi* (鬱棲), a highly literary expression, which both Lin Yutang and Arthur Waley translated into "dunghill." Victor Mair notices this unusual term and argues that the two characters make no sense as a collocation and therefore may represent an attempt to transfer into Chinese characters a non-Sinitic expression (Mair 2005, p. 366). Mair's argument, however, totally misses the point that *Yu Qi* is in fact a unique indigenous Chinese expression of Taoism.[2] In "Perfect Enjoyment" (《至樂》) of *The Writings of Kwang-dze* (《莊子》 *Chuang Tzu*), the author traces the threads of evolution from the multitudinous seeds of things to various plants, insects, birds, plants and eventually to man, and claims that all creatures come out of the great Machinery

[2] In Fay Beauchamp's "Asian origins of Cinderella," the author claims that "it ('Yeh Hsien') is a secular story that does not explain occurrences with reference to any religious system" (2010, p. 492). While Beauchamp maybe correct in arguing that "Yexian story itself is not Hindu or Buddhist" (2010, p. 492), there can be no denying that the story actually has certain Taoist allusions.

(of Evolution) and go back into it again ("人久入於機, 萬物皆出於機, 皆入於機"). One of the early links in the evolutionary chain is "coming to life on mounds and heights, they (the seeds) become the plantain; and, receiving manure, appear as crows' feet." ("生於陵屯則爲陵舄, 陵舄得鬱棲, 則爲烏足。") (Legge 1962, p. 9) James Legge renders the term *Yu Qi* 鬱棲 properly and into "manure": a common source of fertilizer. In an agricultural society, the quality and quantity of food apparently depends upon the strength and value of the manure, which smells unpleasant (*Yu* 鬱), but nevertheless supplies nutrients for plant growth and provides hospitable conditions for the life within the soil (*Qi* 棲).

Being a traditional educated literatus, Duan Chengshi (段成式), who recorded the tale of "Yeh Hsien" must be aware of the allusion to *Chuang Tzu* and chooses the term "*Yu Qi*" accordingly, with a special intent to highlight its magic role in the natural yet enigmatic transformation of life and death. The second reference to the dung is more explicit. Just when Yeh Hsien cries over her lost fish, a mysterious man comes from the sky and consoles her. The man tells Yeh Hsien what has happened to her fish: "Your step-mother has killed the fish and its bones are under the dung" (母殺爾魚矣, 骨在糞下) (Waley 1947, p. 228). He also askes Yeh Hsien to go and find the fish bones, which are now imbued with magic power to grant all her wishes. Yeh Hsien, therefore, rummages through the dung heap to reach the precious fish bones, which are to have a life-changing impact on her. Just like the symbol of "ashes" in the European Cinderella stories, "the dung" in "Yeh Hsien" becomes a complex symbol of humiliation, grief, mourning, transformation, as well as resurrection.

The suspension of beauty

In traditional folktales and fairy tales, beauty often stands as one of the highest values. In her study on female acculturation through fairy tales, Lieberman (1986, p. 188) identifies beauty as a fairy-tale girl's "most valuable asset, perhaps her only valuable asset." She further argues that fairy tales "establish a dichotomy between those women who are gentle, passive and fair, and those who are active, wicked and ugly" (Lieberman 1986, p. 197). In Perrault's "Cendrillon," the beauty of Cendrillon is explicitly stated from the beginning of the story. Despite the hardship of toil forced upon her by the evil stepmother, "Cendrillon, avec ses méchants habits, ne laissait pas d'être cent fois plus belle que ses soeurs, quoique vêtues très magnifiquement" (Perrault 1697, p. 84). Later, when she is dressed up for the ball, her beauty struck everybody with wonder. Even the old King whispered to the Queen that "il y avait longtemps qu'il n'avait vu une si belle et si aimable personne" (Perrault 1697, p. 90). In the Grimms' "Aschenputtel," each time when Aschenputtel appears at the royal ball, her beauty is emphasized: "da war es so schön wie eine Rose, die der Thau gewaschen hat" (Grimm and Grimm 1812, p. 93), "da war es so schön, daß jedermann sich darüber verwunderte, und die Schwestern standen auch da und ärgerten sich, daß jemand schöner war wie sie" (Grimm and Grimm 1812, p. 94), and "Und waren gestern alle über ihre Schönheit erstaunt, so erstaunten sie heute noch mehr" (Grimm and Grimm 1812, p. 96). In both "Cendrillon" and "Aschenputtel," the possession of beauty also sets women against each other as rivals. The

"beauty contest" between Cinderella and the stepsisters seems to imply that "greater beauty means greater virtue" (Cosslett 1996, p. 81). The Prince is enticed by the heroine's beauty and falls in love with her. An equation in which beauty leads to love, and then to successful marriage is set up as a very strong narrative logic underlying the European Cinderella tales.

The Chinese story of "Yeh Hsien," however, seems to have relatively little interest in elaborating the protagonist's beauty. The story begins with a very concise background introduction of the protagonist. Yeh Hsien is described as young, clever, talented and loved by her father ("少慧, 善淘金, 父爰之"). While Yeh Hsien's talent "善淘金" has been translated differently into various domestic skills, such as "working on gold" (Lin 1942, p. 941), "making pottery on the wheel" (Waley 1947, p. 227), and "spinning gold thread" (Moioli 2018, p. 296), it is apparent that Yeh Hsien's father loved her not because that she is a pretty child, but because she is clever and good at fulfilling certain domestic duties. In fact, the description of what Yeh Hsien looks like is not given until towards almost the end of the story. The King, upon finding Yeh Hsien, demands the shoe test, and Yeh Hsien enters the room "looking like a goddess" (Lin 1942, p. 943). A more literal rendering of the original Chinese description ("色若天人") would be Waley's translation of "as beautiful as a heavenly being" (1947, p. 229). The metaphor of "天人" (a heavenly being) is not only concise and abstract, but also interestingly, gender neutral. The emphasize here is more about "heavenly" associations than it is about the feminine beauty. The ability to communicate with mystic beings, such as the talking fish and the wish-granting fish bones, clearly suggests that Yeh Hsien has access to supernatural realities; her striking beauty makes her similar to mythological creatures and further indicates that she is one of those beyond the confines of the secular world.

Another detail worthy of attention is that the size of the protagonist's foot. Yeh Hsien obviously has very tiny feet. This can be seen from the fact that after the King gets the shoe, he makes of all the women in his Kingdom to try it, but it is too small even for those who have small feet ("國主得之, 命其左右履之, 足小者履減一寸。乃令一國婦人履之, 竟無一稱者"). In Perrault's story, after the royal herald proclaims that the Prince will marry her whose foot fits the slipper, ladies of all ranks are permitted to make a trial, but there is no one fit for it. In Grimms' story, the evil stepsisters are so determined to fit into Cinderella's tiny slipper that they cut off their toe and heel respectively in the attempt. There is speculation that Cinderella-type tales were originally from China, where the practice of foot-binding was once common (Sumner 1940, p. 367; Pollard-Gott 2010, p. 169; Bourboulis 1982, p. 107). In most Cinderella versions, "the unrivaled tiny foot size" can be interpreted as "a mark of extraordinary virtue, distinction and beauty" (Bettelheim 2010, p. 237). Furthermore, Yeh Hsien's tiny feet can be understood as symbolizing her innate nobility. The practice of foot binding among Chinese women can be traced back to the Xia Dynasty in the twenty-first century BC, yet it did not become a widely practiced custom until the thirteenth century AD (Wang 2002, pp. 29–33). One of the likeliest theories about the origins of foot-binding suggests that "it started in the imperial courts and became a fashion among upper-class elites" and later "became a *sine qua non* of nubility and nobility" (Whitefield 2008, p. 205). The reference to Yeh Hsien's tiny feet in the Chinese story, therefore, is more than an account of her

beauty: it is also a confirmation of her noble birth, for which she deserves a noble husband.

While there is no doubt that the protagonist, in almost all Cinderella tales, is a beautiful young girl, it seems that Chinese and European versions have treated the theme of beauty rather differently. In both Perrault's and Grimms' story, the protagonist's beauty can be regarded as a powerful component in the narrative logic, which allows her ascent from a life of unjust drudgery to a predetermined course of love and marriage. Comparatively speaking, the Chinese story of "Yeh Hsien" seems to hint at a less important role of beauty. Its narrative elaboration revolves along the loss of and identification through the shoe, while the protagonist's beauty seems to play only minor, if not totally inconsequential, role in the changing of her fate.

The absence of "happily-ever-after"

One of the generic markers of fairy tales is the much-anticipated happy ending of "they lived happily ever after." Gregory Waller even goes so far as to argue that "once 'happily ever after' has been pronounced, there can be no more to tell" (2010, p. 335). In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim comments that this stereotyped ending implies "the ultimate consolation," consisting of "the permanent union" of a Prince and Princess and "the punishment and elimination of evil" (2010, p. 146).

In Perrault's tale, Cinderella was "kind-hearted as she was beautiful" (qui était aussi bonne que belle) who pardons her two repentant sisters and marries them to two lords of the court (1697, p. 95), whereas in the Grimms' version, the story ends with the jealous stepsisters having their feet mutilated (Grimm and Grimm 1812, pp. 100–101), and in a later version, eyes pecked out by doves on the way to the wedding of Cinderella and the Prince. Although the endings differ in terms of the fate of the stepsisters/stepmother, they serve similar purposes of eliminating potential threat to the heroine's life and ensuring the "happily-ever-after" prospect of Cinderella and the Prince. Cinderella deserves a happy ending, because of her beauty and other lovable attributes associated with such beauty. In both Perrault and Grimms, the appearance of Cinderella at the ball is a climactic scene, wherein Cinderella meets the Prince and the two immediately fall in love. To a large extent, Cinderella's beauty and charm justifies their love-at-first-sight experience at the ball and the Prince's determination to chase after her and eventually marry her.

In contrast, "Yeh Hsien" is not a love story at all. Yeh Hsien goes to a local festival in fine clothes and a pair of golden shoes, which she obtains supernaturally. Despite the beautiful garments, her participation in the festival is not successful: she does not meet her future husband. When her stepsister seems to recognize her, Yeh Hsien hurries home, leaving behind one of her shoes. A local person gets the shoe and sells it to a nearby kingdom, where it eventually comes to the attention of the King, who starts searching for the owner and finally finds Yeh Hsien. As the King has never meet the shoe's owner, the only explanation for his obsession is the shoe itself. Besides its tiny size which may symbolize femininity and status, there is something rather bizarre with the shoe: "it was light as down and made no noise

even when treading on stone" ("其輕如毛, 履石無聲") (Waley 1947, p. 229). While Cinderella's dainty glassy slipper has become "a symbol for that which is most desirable in a woman" (Bettelheim 2010, p. 269), this shoe seems to be also credited with a special kind of mystical power. More frightened than intrigued by the shoe, the King orders a wide search for its owner, not for the purpose to find his ideal bride, but to solve the perturbing shoe mystery: "Then they went everywhere through all the people's houses and arrested them. If there was a woman's shoe, they arrested them and told the King of T'o-han." ("即遍歷人家捕之, 若有女履者, 捕之以告") (Waley 1947, p. 229). The King's first reaction upon finding Yeh Hsien is surprise and bewilderment: "He thought it strange, searched the inner-rooms and found Yeh-hsien" ("陀汗王怪之, 乃搜其室, 得葉限") (Waley 1947, p. 229). After being convinced that Yeh Hsien is the owner of the shoe and getting to know her story, the King takes the fish bones and Yeh Hsien back to his own Kingdom ("載魚骨與葉限俱還國"). Placing the fish bones before Yeh Hsien, the original Chinese text seems to suggest that the King's primary interest lies not in Yeh Hsien herself, but in her dowry: the magic wish-granting fish bones. Without the fish bones, it is doubtful whether the king would be willing take Yeh Hsien back home, let alone making her his "chief wife" (以叶限为上妇). If Cinderella's marriage with the Prince is a symbol of the happiest of unions and the ultimate reward for the heroine, Yeh Hsien's marriage is but "a veiled disapproval of marriage for money" (Moioli 2018, p. 29).

Consequently, the characterization and plotting in the Chinese story of "Yeh Hsien" operate according to a narrative logic very different from that of its European counterparts. The emphasis is placed on the protagonist's supernatural connections rather than on her beauty, and the ideal of romantic love cedes its place to pragmatics in the selection of a marriage partner. Eventually, in "Yeh Hsien," there is a lack of commitment, or even an attempt to pursue the fantasy of "happily ever after."

When everything is in vain

Most fairy tales give the reader a very clear and straightforward moral message. At the end of "Cendrillon," Perrault draws heavily on the Christian concept of morality, emphasizing the importance of "good grace" (bonne grâce) and "des marraines" (Godmothers) (1697, p. 96). "Aschenputtel" has a similar moral, but also shows us that the life of evil-doers carries its own punishment. Most Chinese tales follow a Buddhist karmic law, according to which "good begets good and evil begets evil" (恶有恶報,善有善報), but such a moral does not seem to apply to the story of "Yeh Hsien."

The ending of the story entails a palpable sense of nihilistic absurdity. The fate of the stepmother and the stepsister in "Yeh Hsien" is charted in a rather bizarre way. They are both killed by flying stones (其母及女即爲飛石擊死). The punishment seems unreasonably cruel, especially taking into consideration that the stepsister has done nothing particularly evil, and her only fault is perhaps to recognize Yeh Hsien at the festival. After their death, the plot takes another totally unpredictable twist: the cave people feel sorry for them, build a giant burial mound over their bodies, make offerings to them, and worship them as dispensers of love-magic ("洞人哀

之, 埋于石坑, 命曰懊女塚。洞人以爲禖祀, 求女必應"). For Waley, this episode "comes as rather a shock" and may represent "a fragment of cult-origin myth [that] has been arbitrarily inserted in the story" (1947, p. 233). Similarly, Moioli argues that here "the structure appears totally inconsistent" (2018, p. 244).

Aside from the fate of the stepmother and the stepsister, the things that happen to the protagonist also come upon the reader as a surprise. Yeh Hsien, the apathetically obedient and hardworking protagonist, receives no substantial reward. Although she is married to a King, there is a lingering shadow of unhappiness in her life. In the first year of their marriage, the greedy King starts to ask the magic fish bones for precious things. He prays for so many treasures that a year later the fish bones refuse to grant his wishes. Shortly after his insatiable desire is frustrated, his kingdom falls to ruin in a military rebellion while all riches are washed away by the tide. ("一年, 王貪求, 祈於魚骨, 寶玉無限。逾年, 不復應。王乃葬魚骨於海岸, 用珠百斛藏之, 以金爲隄。至征卒叛時, 將發以贍軍。一夕, 爲海潮所淪")

Bettelheim once commented that the difference between myths and fairy tales lies in "the pervasive pessimism of myths and the essential optimism of fairy tales" (2010, p. 41). Strictly speaking, the Chinese tale of "Yeh Hsien" can be categorized neither to the genre of myth nor to the fairytale, or even folktale. It belongs to the traditional Chinese literary genre of *zhiguai* (志怪), records of strange occurrences in the periphery of the empire. Throughout the story, the reference to the caveman's festival, the indigenous cult of worship, the mutiny of the conscripted soldier and the fall of the kingdom all add a bizarre but realistic touch to the story. The general attitude of "Yeh Hsien" is neither pessimistic nor optimistic, but realistic: it is not about rewarding the good or punishing the evil; it is the realization of "everything is just as it is." We all know that in the real world, the righteous is not necessarily rewarded and the wicked is not necessarily punished. What is more, if one accepts that the emptiness and absurdity of the world is woven into the very nature of our existence, it is not that difficult to embrace the random bits, or even some nonsensical plot twists in "Yeh Hsien." One might also get something meaningless but profound from its ending: Not all the wicked are punished and not all punishments are justified; Kings are not always sitting on their thrones; life oscillates; the tides of the sea come and go; eventually there is nothing left but a complete void.

Conclusions

Since "Cinderella" is one of the most popular fairy tales in the world and there are many oral and literary versions of it distributed worldwide, it may be appropriate to consider and compare some of the important motifs woven into the story, which, in their combination, account for the convergence and divergence of different narrative traditions.

European Cinderella stories, represented by Perrault's "Cendrillon" and Grimms' "Aschenputtel," feature similar plots of a poor and underprivileged girl, despised and persecuted by those around her, who triumphs by winning the love of a handsome prince through her beauty and grace. Cinderella's journey to her prince is both "the quest for social place" as well as "the quest for the self," two themes that are very

powerful not only in fairy tales and folktales, but also "when the fashions and conventions of realism take hold" (Rowen 1995, p. 29). The European Cinderella story, therefore, never ceases to be told, and its form of narrative remains active though numerous retellings and adaptations.

While using similar archetypes, the Chinese story "Yeh Hsien" seems to feature quite different symbols and themes. Without feeling much commitment to the ideology of beauty and love, the Chinese tale follows a rather pragmatic logic of use, to which family relations, life, marriage, and even magic must be submitted. Within this logic, many strange and almost absurdly amusing episodes in the story, such as the note that the magic fish tastes twice as good as an ordinary fish, the fact that the magic fish-bones are under the dung, the protagonist's marriage to a greedy King, the honor and worship the villains get after their punishment, the King's burying of the treasures at the seashore and their doomed disappearance, all become understandable. Yet, they obviously still do not appeal to modern taste and contemporary sensibilities. This may shed some light on the reason why unlike Cinderella who takes her place among the icons of popular culture worldwide, Yeh Hsien has been an obscure name long-forgotten even by most native Chinese readers.

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